

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS RIO DE JANEIRO 000353

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EPSC - ALLEN
STATE PASS EPA FOR CAM HILL-MACON AND S.HOFFMAN
STATE FOR OES/PCI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [TSPA](#) [SOCI](#) [BR](#) [TIP](#)

SUBJECT: Brazilian Police Arrest Suspect in Environmentalist's Death

Ref: Rio de Janeiro 00308

1. Brazil's Federal Police arrested hunter Leonardo de Carvalho Marques, who shot environmentalist Dionisio Julio Ribeiro Junior in the head with a shotgun on February 23 in the Tingua Natural Reserve in Nova Iguacu. Ribeiro Junior had spent fifteen years of his life defending the Reserve from illegal wildlife trade and illegal exploitation of palm trees and other plants. Leonardo confessed to the crime, but did not convince public security authorities that he acted alone. Environmentalists in the area claim that the crime was planned deliberately by a group of hunters, palm cutters, animal traders, and perhaps some corrupt employees of the Brazilian Environmental Agency (IBAMA). Police located Leonardo through an anonymous tip ("Disque-Denuncia", a police hotline to denounce crimes).

2. Federal Police and public security authorities said the police would continue investigating the case because they believe Leonardo may have been a hired hit man. Leonardo said he killed Ribeiro Junior because the environmentalist was constantly reporting the illegal activities of hunters in the Tingua Reserve to IBAMA. The environmentalist's various accusations helped the police to confiscate several guns in recent years, including five shotguns belonging to Leonardo.

3. According to the police, Leonardo was raised in the Tingua Reserve area. Besides being a hunter since the age of seventeen, Leonardo also helped in illegal palm tree cutting to extract the hearts of palm in the region. Police suspect that he also sold tropical birds and animals to local restaurants. Federal Police received several complaints about these allegations and will start an investigation.

4. Leonard also confessed to killing a woman and burying her body in the Reserve. He told the police he caught the woman trying to break into his house and killed her. The police do not believe this and will pursue an investigation into this crime as well.

5. The GOB has created a task force consisting of members of IBAMA, Federal and Civil Police and State Military Police to investigate the main complaints made by Ribeiro Junior: illegal palm cutting to extract the hearts of palm, hunting of tropical birds and animals, illegal exploitation of sand (for construction work), and irregular land occupation of the protected area. They intend to start working this week. The Brazilian Environmental Ministry will contribute Reais 60,000 (approximately USD 23,000) to fund the work.

6. Two representatives of Ribeiro Junior's NGO "Grupo de Defesa da Natureza" (Nature Defense Group) are in Brasilia to speak to the Ministry of Justice and the Congress, to demand permanent occupation of the Tingua Reserve by appropriate governmental forces. They agree that the GOB task force will help, but they claim only a continuous police presence will guarantee protection of the environmentalists in that region and the delicate ecosystem in the Reserve.

7. COMMENT: An official from NGO Justica Global told us that the main problem IBAMA has been facing for some time is the lack of personnel to inspect protected areas. IBAMA is the government organism responsible for this oversight and estimates that Brazil has one inspector for every 37,000 hectares of protected area. Prior to Ribeiro Junior's assassination, the 27,000-hectare Tingua Biological Reserve had four inspectors. In the wake of Ribeiro Junior's murder, the Federal Government via IBAMA announced that seven more environmental agents will be assigned to the State of Rio de Janeiro, but did not indicate if any would be assigned to the Reserve.

ATKINS